DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 825 CS 007 895

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TITLE School Based Homework Assistance Program.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Florida Reading Association (22nd, Jacksonville, FL, October 18-21, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Homework; *Language Arts; Mathematics Instruction; Program Descriptions; *School Community Relationship; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS Florida (Duval County); *Homework Assistance Programs; University of North Florida

ABSTRACT

Resulting from a joint venture between the University of North Florida and the Duval County Public School System, homework assistance programs are available to students in the large urban public school system of Jacksonville. The homework assistance programs are committed to providing a free source of immediate aid to students and parents who encounter problems completing homework assignments. A help-with-homework telephone hotline was first installed in the county professional library. Teachers are trained to assist the callers in finding the solution on their own. Each hotline team includes two elementary school teachers and one teacher certified in secondary language arts and one in secondary math. The hotline operates three hours per night, four evenings per week. The success of the hotline precipitated the Homework Assistance Program three months later. This program also provides teacher assistance, using school media centers as resource centers after regular school hours. The teacher teams in the resource centers also consist of math and language arts teachers. These assistance centers operate two hours a day, two days a week. Participation in both programs has shown that students and parents desire such academic assistance, but a vital component of the success of these programs has been the cooperation between the university and the public school system, a model that has received national attention. (HTH)

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SCHOOL BASED HOMEWORK ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Homework assistance programs are available to students in a large, urban public school system in Jacksonville, Florida. Jacksonville is a city in which more than 99,000 students are enrolled in the public schools in grades kindergarten through 12. The homework assistance programs are a result of a joint venture between the University of North Florida and the Duval County Public School System through its Community Education Department. The Duval County School System has received national attention for their innovative Community Education Program and as one of the largest, accrediated school systems in the country, is strongly committed to serving the needs of not only their school-age students, but the needs of the entire community. The school system strongly supports academic excellence and encourages teachers to raise academic standards in classrooms by reinforcing skill teaching through homework assignments.

In a recent three county survey of elementary and secondary classroom teachers, the data showed that most teachers assigned homework 4 days a week and 75% of them allotted 60 minutes for completion of the homework. Sixty percent of the assignments are in the area of math. Many students receiving these assignments found them difficult to complete without some assistance. The needs of many children may require extra time which the classroom teacher doesn't have. The homework assistance programs are committed to provide a free source of immediate aid to students and parents who are encountering problems in the successful completion of homework assignments.

CS007895

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Because the University of North Florida is an urban school founded on the philosophy that constant growth and knowledge require the partnership and cooperation of various institutions, a collaborative project was reasonable, and in 1981, the Help With Homework Hotline Program was initiated to provide a telephone assistance program to students and parents.

Because of a positive effort to ensure improved academic achievement for the students of the public school system, the School Based Homework Assistance Program was launched just three months after the implementation of the successful Help With Homework Hotline Program.

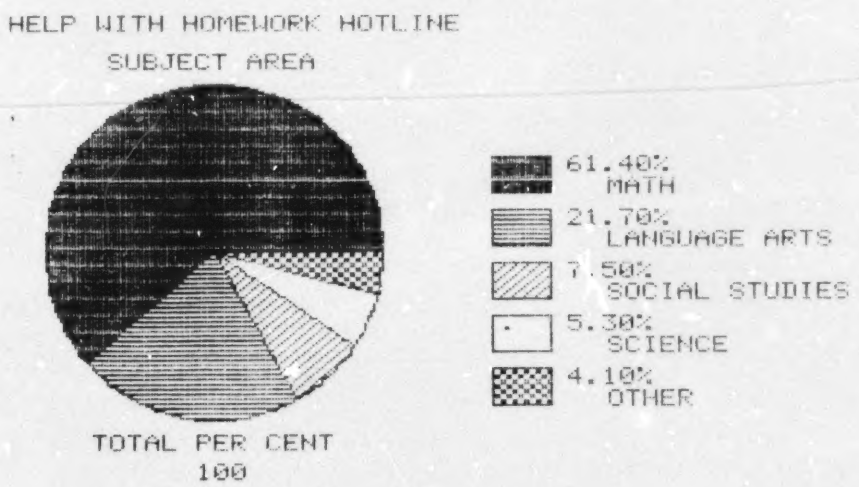
Help With Homework Hotline

The Help With Homework Hotline consists of a bank of telephones installed in the Duval County Professional Library and manned by teams of certificated public school teachers. Teachers serving as Hotline operators are enrolled in a graduate course at the University of North Florida, and earn three credit hours. UNF provides an instructor for the course who conducts training sessions for the Hotline operators and who helps provide ongoing supervision of the students. The project trains operators in the use of the special telephone system and strategies for effectively assisting callers. The teachers are instructed not to provide the answer to homework problems, but to positively assist the caller in finding the solution to the problem, The program is not a tutoring service. The telephone lines are available for three to five minutes per caller to assist students and parents.

The Hotline program operates four evenings a week, Monday through Thursday, from 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.. Each incoming call is logged in by the Hotline operator.

Information regarding the callers' grade level, day of the week, time, subject area and length of call is recorded. Each Hotline Team includes two Elementary teachers and one teacher certified in Secondary Language Arts and one certified Secondary Math. Teams vary from six to eight members and field calls one night a week.

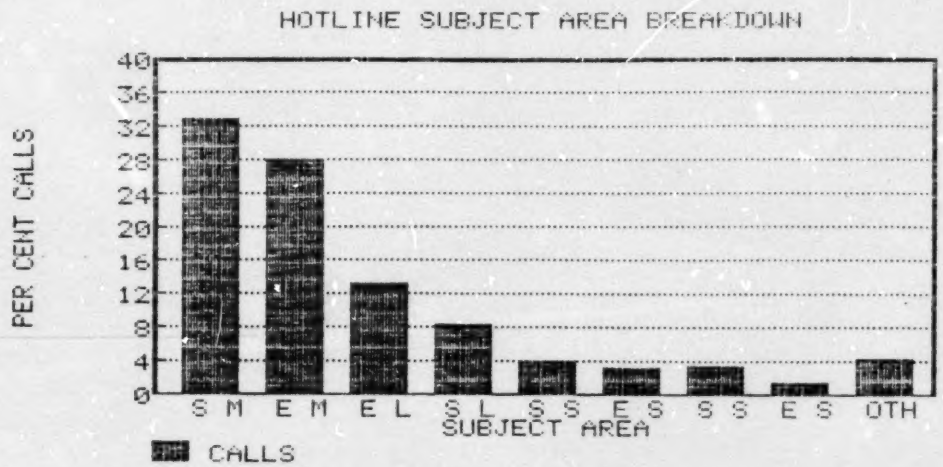
In addition to the incoming lines for students and parents, there is a call back line and a telecommunication line for the hearing impaired. An automatic telephone recorded is utilized to record messages when all lines are in use. The recorded message requests the callers name and phone number and the calls are returned by the operators each night.

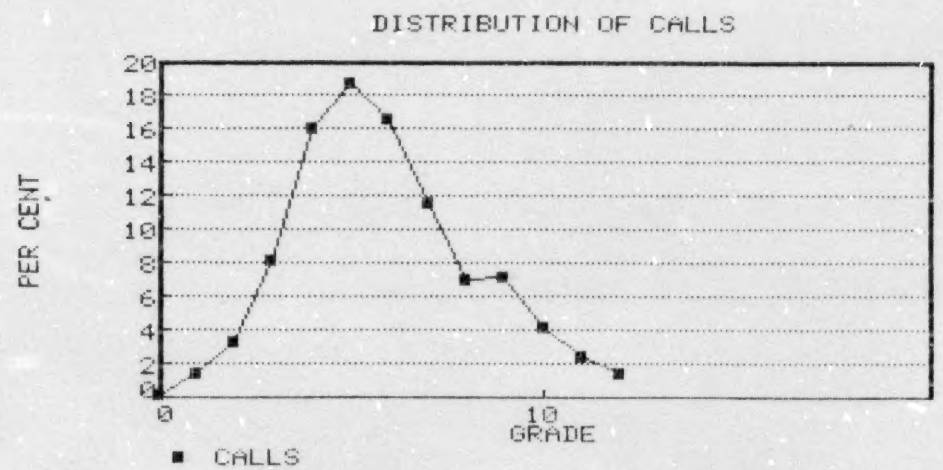


An analysis to the data indicates that (61%) over half of the callers are questions concerning math while 21% of the calls concern English, language arts and reading. Thirty-three percent of the callers have questions concerning elementary math and 28% of the calls concern secondary math.

Fourteen percent of the calls are in elementary language arts while only 7% of the calls are in secondary language arts. More than half of the calls (56.9) are for assistance in grades 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The operators assist an average 130 calls a night and are able to assist 95% of all calls, while 5% are referred to other sources.





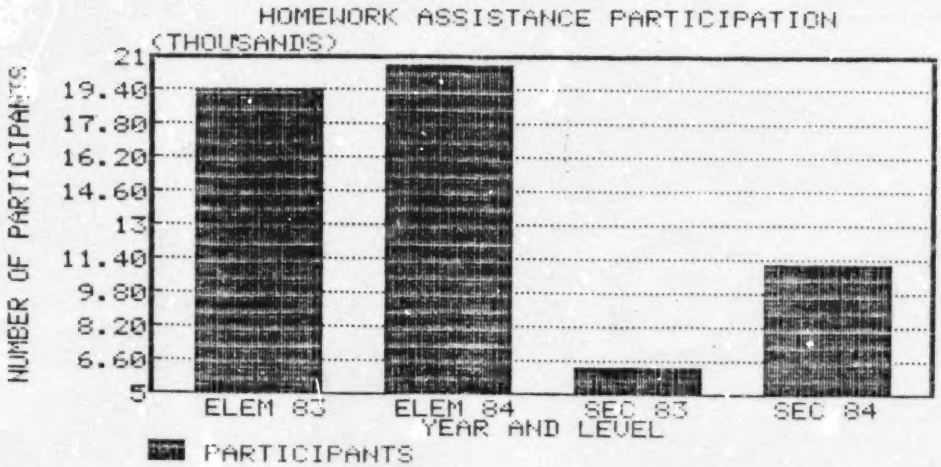
School Based Homework Assistance Program

Because of the success of the Homework Hotline Program the School Based Homework Assistance Program was developed three months later. The program provides one-to-one assistance in all academic areas. This program provides students and parents with the services of certified classroom teachers in resolving problems they encounter in the completion of homework assignments, and makes Media Centers available as resource centers after regular school hours.

Fifty-eight public schools are designated as Homework Assistance Centers with 33 serving elementary students and 25 serving secondary students. The program is housed in the school Media Center and each center is staffed with teams of certified teachers. Each team consists of one math teacher and one language arts teacher. Teams vary from 2 to 4 certified teachers per site. Teachers serving as homework assistants are enrolled in a graduate course and earn three credit hours.

Similar to the Help With Homework Hotline Program, UNF provides an instructor for the course who conducts training for the teachers and provides ongoing supervision of the program. Teachers are instructed not to provide the answer to homework problems, but to positively assist the student or parent in finding the solution to the problem. Homework Assistance Centers operate two hours a day, two days a week. The average participation per day of operation is 321.

It would appear that the participation in both programs has shown that both students and parents desire academic assistance. This need has been evidenced by the large number of students who take part in the programs.



Summary

To undertake a collaborative project of this magnitude, a commitment must be made by both agencies. Tangible results are seen in the increase in use of both programs. The project has generated tremendous enthusiasm on every level of the educational system as well as among the public. We are convinced that the continued active collaboration of those institutions whose purpose is to strengthen the educational system will assure the continuation of this project.

A vital component of the success of the Homework Assistance Programs has been the "marriage" of the public school system and UNF. The advantage of this format is the working together of a local university with the public school system. These agencies are cooperating in the planning and implementation of programs to assist the students and parents of Duval County.

This successful collaborative effort has received national attention and serves as a "model" program as a result of it's innovative approach. The Homework Assistance Project has proven that universities as well as school systems, are able to collaborate for the betterment of the students and parents in the local community.

It seems clear that the programs have produced positive effects not only with faculty members, students and parents but with classroom teachers as well. The teachers found renewal, growth, and support through their work in the programs. They reported that the one-to-one ratio with students an effective teaching strategy and displayed an overall enthusiastic and positive attitude toward the programs. Since teachers tend to work in isolation, the team approach allows them to share successes and support one another. Parents are becoming partners in the educational process of their children in Jacksonville, Florida. The teachers, parents, and students who have participated so far have found the program to be overwhelming beneficial.